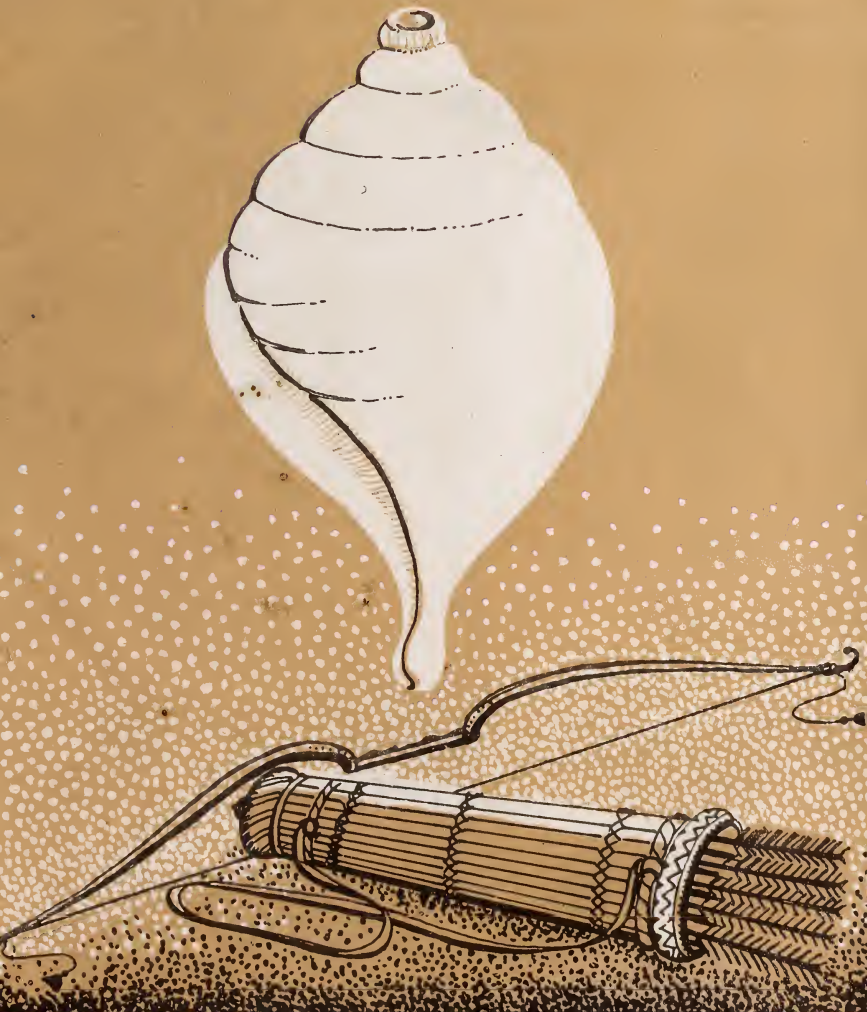
THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

M. K. GANDHI



THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

M. K. GANDHI

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD – 380 014

Rupees Five

© Navajivan Trust, 1959

First Edition, 10,000 Copies, June 1959
Sixth Reprint 3,000 Copies, October 1996
Total : 28,000 Copies

ISBN 81-7229-072-1

Printed and Published by
Jitendra T. Desai
Navajivan Mudranalaya
Ahmedabad-380 014
INDIA

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA	7
2	GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE	18
3	YAJNA OR THE SCIENCE OF SACRIFICE	27
4	CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE GITA	32
5	THE PLACE OF THE GITA IN HINDUISM	35
6	TWO DISCOURSES ON THE GITA	37
7	GITA JAYANTI	45
8	KRISHNA OF THE GITA	47
9	A JANMASHTAMI DISCOURSE	49
10	HINDU STUDENTS AND THE GITA	51
11	THE GITA IN SCHOOLS	54
12	GITA AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT	55

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/mkbook0100mkga

THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

Harijan, 29-4-'33, p. 2 M. K. GANDHI

CHAPTER 1

THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The Adiparva contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

2. The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

3. In this great work the *Gita* is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

4. Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

5. In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness and there is no violence done to Truth. There is a Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine." And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this

train of thought that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

6. This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gita*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the *Gita* even at the risk of repetition.

7. *That matchless remedy is renunciation of the fruits of action.*

8. This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action *is*

tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action, i.e. from the taint of sin? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language: "By desireless action; by renouncing the fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e. by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

9. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the Vedas from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgenece. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*, "Have devotion, and knowledge will follow." This devotion is not mere lip-worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

10. Thus the devotion required by the *Gita* is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings,

but these things are not test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

11. We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.

12. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions, a mere learned man will pass as a *pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting of a *lota*.

13. Or take *bhakti*. The popular notion of *bhakti* is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This *bhakta*, therefore, leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

14. But the *Gita* says: "No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?"

15. While on the one hand it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in

the term action. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the *Gita* has solved the problem is, to my knowledge, unique. The *Gita* says: "Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work."

This is the unmistakable teaching of the *Gita*. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

16. Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The *Gita* reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the *Gita* is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given

to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says goodbye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

17. From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and wordly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita*, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

18. Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the *Gita*, one is bound to follow truth and *ahimsa*. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the *Gita* age. The *Gita* had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out so early as the second chapter.

19. But if the *Gita* believed in *ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*.

20. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning

of great writing suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the *Gita*, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal-sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the *Gita* by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the *Gita* it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible

without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form.

21. The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

22. Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

23. The *Gita* has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say:

> "Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will

by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."

Young India, 6-8-1931

CHAPTER 2

GITA AND NON-VIOLENCE

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *ahimsa*. One of the lines of the Gujarati poet, Shamal Bhatta, has taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love, and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of non-violence from it. It did not, for instance, cover all animal life. I had, before this, tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction today that even venomous creatures may not be killed by a believer in *ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel: 'What wonder if Britain rules!' etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, and there I escaped meat-eating etc. because of my determination to

follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

Now whilst in England my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read', because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the *Gita* unaided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the second chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach are the 'eternal verities'. There is reasoning in them but they represent realized knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would even advise rejection of the verses

that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say: "It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come." That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Every one cannot solve an algebraical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine quo non.* How ill would the grand truth 'I am *brahman*' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man therefore who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must practise the *yamas* and *niyamas*—the eternal guides of conduct. A superficial practice thereof is useless. The *shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *guru.* But a *gugu* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill-equipped to interpret the scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them,

but that will not be the true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

But even for the inexperienced there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts with Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth—*sat*—is positive; non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, non-violence negatives the fact. And yet non-violence is the highest religion. Truth is self-evident; non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but as it is not self-evident a man may seek to interpret the *shastras* without accepting it. But his acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said: 'Violence is unreal, non-violence is real.' Realization of Truth is impossible without non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul of Truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his search for

Truth and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *shastras*.

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* is a notable book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is a verse in it which brackets drums, *shudras*, fools and women together as fit to be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife, what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita the ideal wife, and Bharat the ideal of a devoted brother. And justification incidentally met with therein of vicious customs should therefore be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realization and its means is the

theme of the *Gita*, the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might, if you like, say that the poet himself was not against war or violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the *Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of way by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadavas today?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite wrong to emphasize those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

The poet when he writes is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *himsa* but *ahimsa* is amply demonstrated

in the second chapter and summarized in the concluding 18th chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to the state beyond *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

It was not in a spirit of *ahimsa* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Shri Krishna knows every one's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He, therefore, told him: "Thou hast already done the killing. Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun." If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given

on a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *himsa* is the law of life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body.

And who are Dhritarashtra and Yudhishthira and Arjuna? Who is Krishna? Were they all historical characters? And does the *Gita* describe them as such? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him? And which is that *Gita*—the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which therefore he gave in the form of *Anugita*?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the poet seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch the heart needs the winding of purity, or the Dweller ceases to speak.

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or no; but that is not his *dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *moksha*, and *moksha* is the realization of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice is killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously?

Young India, 12-11-1925

CHAPTER 3

YAJNA OR THE SCIENCE OF SACRIFICE

Yajna means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life. Therefore, and, also from the standpoint of *ahimsa*, it is not a *yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the *Vedas*. It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in Vedic scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of Vedic society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*.

Again a primary sacrifice must be an act, which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not, therefore, be a *yajna*, much less a *mahayajna*, to

wish or do ill to any one else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the *Gita* teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *yajna* promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *yajna* in this sense, and therefore the *Gita*, after having dealt with true wisdom in the second chapter, takes up in the third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *yajna* came with the creation itself. This body, therefore, has been given us, only in order that we may serve all creation with it. And, therefore, says the *Gita*, he who eats without offering *yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *yajna*. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bondslave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be charished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for

complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,"— this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten any one. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large.

Again, not only the good, but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.

Some object, that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for

the householder. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will therefore not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to answer to it. No doubt such sacrificers obtain their livelihood by their work. But livelihood is not their objective, but only a by-product of their vocation. A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying. Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immortality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude to life. One man will enjoy theatrical scenery, another the ever new scenes which unfold themselves in the sky. Joy,

therefore, is a matter of individual and national education. We shall relish things which we have been taught to relish as children. And illustrations can be easily cited of different national tastes.

Again, many sacrificers imagine that they are free to receive from the people everything they need, and many things they do not need, because they are rendering disinterested service. Directly this idea sways a man, he ceases to be a servant, and becomes a tyrant over the people.

One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Again, one dare not be negligent in service, or be behindhand with it. He, who thinks that one must be diligent only in one's personal business, and unpaid public business may be done in any way and at any time one chooses, has still to learn the very rudiments of the science of sacrifice. Voluntary service of other demands the best of which one is capable, and must

take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.

From Yeravda Mandir, Chap. XIV-XV

CHAPTER 4

CENTRAL TEACHING OF THE GITA

"Is the central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence?"

"I have no doubt that it is *anasakti*—selfless action. Indeed, I have called my little translation of the *Gita Anasaktiyoga*. And *anasakti* transcends *ahimsa*. He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *anasakti*, it does not go beyond it."

"Then does the *Gita* teach *himsa* and *ahimsa* both?"

"I do not read that meaning in the *Gita*. It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate *ahimsa*, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that if its central theme is *anasakti*, it also teaches *ahimsa*. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *ahimsa*. In the life beyond there is no *himsa* or *ahimsa*."

'But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *ahimsa*. For Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve:

"Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow.' And Lord Krishna teaches him to answer 'blow with blow'."

"There I join issue with you," said Gandhiji. "Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday', says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even today you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin!' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest."

Harijan, 1-9-1940

Fearlessness

Every reader of the *Gita* is aware that fearlessness heads the list of the Divine Attributes enumerated in the 16th chapter. Whether this is merely due to the exigencies of metre, or whether the pride of place has been deliberately yielded to fearlessness is more than I can say. In my opinion, however, fearlessness fully deserves the first rank assigned to it there, perhaps, by

accident. Fearlessness is a *sine qua non* for the growth of the other noble qualities. How can one seek Truth or cherish Love without fearlessness? As Pritam has it, "The path of Hari (the Lord) is the path of the brave, not of cowards." Hari here means Turth, and the brave are those armed with fearlessness, not with the sword, the rifle or other carnal weapons which are affected only by cowards.

Young India, 11-9-1930

The Gospel of Work

A visitor asked Gandhiji if he was not putting too much emphasis on the gospel of work, if not making a kind of fetish of work. Gandhiji replied: "Not at all. I have always meant what I said. There can never be too much emphasis placed on work. I am simply repeating the gospel taught by the *Gita*, where the Lord says, 'If I did not remain ever at work sleeplessly, I should set a wrong example to mankind.' Did I not appeal to the professional men to turn the wheel to set an example to the rest of our countrymen?"

"Would you do the same thing with say one like Lord Buddha?"

"Yes; without the slightest hesitation."

"Then what would you say about great saints like Tukaram and Dnyanadev?"

"Who am I to judge them?"

"But you would judge Buddha?"

"I never said so. I simply said, if I had the good fortune to be face to face with one like him, I should not hesitate to ask him why he did not teach the gospel of work, in preference to one of contemplation. I should do the same thing if I were to meet these saints."

Harijan, 2-11-1935

CHAPTER 5

THE PLACE OF THE GITA IN HINDUISM

I have admitted in my introduction to the *Gita* known as *Anasakti Yoga* that it is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism, as it is practised today or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the *Koran* or the *Bible*. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *karma*, *sannyasa*, *yajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into

Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured, in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experience in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice', and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not

affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Anyway I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were the outcome of a study of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, etc.

Harijan, 3-10-1936

CHAPTER 6

TWO DISCOURSES ON THE GITA

[The following two discourses were sent by Gandhiji to members of his Ashram at Sabarmati, from Yeravda Jail.]

I

Bhakti Yoga

I run to my *Mother Gita* whenever I find myself in difficulties, and up to now she has never failed to comfort me. It is possible that those who are getting comfort from the *Gita* may get greater help, and see something altogether new, if they come to know the way in which I understand it from day to day.

This day I feel like giving a summary of the twelfth chapter. It is Bhakti Yoga—realization of God through devotion. At the time of marriage

we ask the bridal couple to learn this chapter by heart and meditate upon it, as one of the five sacrifices to be performed. Without devotion, action and knowledge are cold and dry, and may even become shackles. So, with the heart full of love, let us approach this meditation on the *Gita*.

Arjuna asks of the Lord: "Which is the better of the two, the devotee who worships the Manifest or the one who worships the Unmanifest?" The Lord says in reply: "Those who meditate on the Manifest in full faith, and lose themselves in Me, those faithful ones are My devotees. But those who worship the Unmanifest, and who, in order to do so, restrain all their senses, look upon and serve all alike, regarding none as high or low, those also realize Me."

So it cannot be affirmed that one is superior to the other. But it may be counted as impossible for an embodied being fully to comprehend and adore the Unmanifest. The Unmanifest is attributeless, and is beyond the reach of human vision. Therefore all embodied beings, consciously or unconsciouly, are devotees of the Manifest.

"So", saith the Lord, "let thy mind be merged in My Universal Body, which has form. Offer thy all at His feet. But if thou canst not do this, practise the restraint of the passions of thy mind. By observing *yama* and *niyama* with the

help of *pranayama*, *asana* and other practices, bring the mind under control. If thou canst not do thus, then perform all thy works with this in mind: that whatever work thou undertakest, that thou dost for My sake. Thus thy worldly infatuations and attachments will fade away, and gradually thou wilt become stainless and pure. The fountain of love will rise in thee. But if thou canst not do even this, then renounce the fruit of all thy actions; yearn no more after the fruits of thy work. Ever do that work which falls to thy lot. Man cannot be master over the fruits of his work. The fruit of work appears only after causes have combined to form it. Therefore be thou only the instrument. Do not regard as superior or inferior any of these four methods which I have shown unto thee. Whatever, in them, is suitable for thee, that make thou use of in thy practice of devotion.

"It seems that the path of hearing, meditating and comprehending, may be easier than the path of *yama*, *niyama*, *pranayama* and *asana*, to which I have referred; easier than that may be concentration and worship; and again easier than concentration may be renunciation of the fruits of works. The same method cannot be equally easy for everyone; some may have to turn for help to all these methods. They are certainly intermixed. In any case thou wishest

to be a devotee. Achieve that goal by whatever method thou canst. My part is simply to tell thee whom to count a true devotee. A devotee hates no one; bears no grudge against any one; befriends all creatures; is merciful to all. To accomplish this he eliminates all attachments; his ego is dissolved and he becomes as nothing; for him grief and happiness are one; he forgives those who trespass against himself, as he hungers for forgiveness from the world for his own faults; he dwells in contentment; he is firm in his good resolves; he surrenders to Me his mind, his intellect, his all. He never causes in other beings trouble or fear, himself knowing no trouble or fear from others. My devotee is free from joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. He has no desires, he is pure, skilful and wise. He has renounced all ambitious undertakings. He stands by his resolves, renouncing their good or bad fruit; he remains unconcerned. Such a one knows not enemies or friends, is beyond honour or disgrace.

"In peace and silence, contented with whatever may come his way, he lives inwardly as if alone, and always remains calm no matter what may be going on around him. One who lives in this manner, full of faith, he is My 'beloved devotee'."

Young India, 13-11-1930

II

Arjuna-vishada-yoga

The *Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is considered to be a historical work but, for us, both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are not historical works, but religious works, or rather, if we call them histories, they are the histories of the soul. And it is not the description of what happened thousands of years ago, but it is the picture of what is going on in every human breast today. In both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* there is the description of the battle that is daily going on between the Gods and the Demons, between Rama and Ravana. The dialogue in the *Gita* between Shri Krishna and Arjuna is one such description. That dialogue is recited by Sanjaya before the blind Dhritarashtra. *Gita* means 'sung'. Here the word *Upanishad* is understood, so the complete meaning is, an '*Upanishad* that is sung'. *Upanishad* means Knowledge—instruction. Thus the *Gita* means the teachings of Shri Krishna to Arjuna. We should read the *Gita* with the realization that the Inward Seer, Lord Krishna is ever present in our breasts, and that, whenever we, becoming as Arjuna in his desire for knowledge, turn to Him, He is ever ready to shelter us. We are asleep, the Inward Seer is

always awake. He is awaiting the wakening of desire for knowledge in us. We do not know how to ask. We are not even inclined to ask. Therefore we daily contemplate a book like the *Gita*. We wish to create in ourselves a desire for religious knowledge—a desire to learn spiritual enquiry, while meditating on it. Whenever under stress we hasten to the *Gita* for relief and obtain consolation, it is at once for us a Teacher—a Mother. And we must have faith that with our head in her lap we shall always remain safe. The *Gita* shall unravel all our spiritual tangles. Those who will meditate on the *Gita* in this way will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day. There is not a single spiritual tangle which the *Gita* cannot unravel. It is a different thing, if on account of our insufficient faith, we do not know how to read and understand it. We daily recite the *Gita* in order that our faith may continually increase and that we may be ever wakeful. I am giving here the substance of what meanings I have obtained, and am still obtaining, from such meditations of the *Gita*, for the help of the inmates of the Ashram.

When the Pandavas and the Kauravas, with their armies, stand on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, then Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, describes to the teacher Drona the principal warriors of both sides. As both the

armies prepare for the battle, their conches are blown, and Lord Shri Krishna, who is Arjuna's charioteer, drives up their chariot between the two armies. On seeing this Arjuna becomes agitated, and says to Shri Krishna: "How can I fight these men? Had they been other persons I would have fought with them forthwith. But these are my people, mine own! Where is the difference between the Kauravas and the Pandavas? They are first cousins. We were brought up together. Drona can hardly be called the teacher of the Kauravas alone. It was he who taught us all the sciences. Bhishma is the head of our whole family. How can there be a fight with him? True the Kauravas are murderous; they have done many evil deeds, many iniquities; they have deprived the Pandavas of their land; they have insulted a great and faithful woman like Draupadi. All this is their fault indeed, but what good can come of killing them? They are without understanding. Why should I behave like them? I at least have some knowledge. I can discriminate between good and evil; so I must know that to fight one's relatives is sinful. What does it matter that they have swallowed up the family share of the Pandavas? Let them kill us. How can we raise our hands against them? Oh Krishna! I will not fight these

relatives of mine." So saying Arjuna collapses in his chariot.

In this way the first chapter closes. It is called *Arjuna-vishad-yoga*. *Vishada* means distress. We have to experience such distress as Arjuna experienced. Knowledge cannot be obtained without spiritual anguish and thirst for knowledge. What good can religious discourses be to a man who does not feel in his mind even so much as a desire to know what is good and what is bad. The battlefield of Kurukshetra is only by the way; the true Kurukshetra is our body. It is at once the *Kurukshetra* and *Dharmakshetra*. If we regard it as and make it, the abode of God, it is the *Dharmakshetra*. In this battlefield lies one battle or another always before us, and most of such battles arise out of the ideas, "this is mine, this is thine." Such battles arise out of the difference between "my people and thy people". Hence the Lord will later on tell Arjuna that the root of all irreligion is attachment and aversion. Believe a thing to be 'mine', and attachment is created for it. Believe a thing to be 'not mine', and aversion is created—enmity is created. The *Gita* and all the other religious books of the world proclaim to us that the difference between mine and thine should be forgotten, that is to say attachment and aver-

sion should be relinquished. It is one thing to say this, and it is another thing to act according to it. The *Gita* teaches us to act according to it also.

Young India, 20-11-1930

CHAPTER 7

GITA JAYANTI

I do not know that these *jayantis* serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly, because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and such other works on the millions. In yielding to Shri Ketkar's pressure, therefore, I entertain the hope that those who take part in the forthcoming celebration will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song. I have

endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment. The theme of the *Gita* is contained in the second chapter and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The *Gita* has been called गीताई (*Gitai*) by Vinoba who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is the real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties. I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in distress. It is, moreover, a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard the *Gita* as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But in my opinion, a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the *Gita*. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.

Harijan, 16-12-1939

CHAPTER 8

KRISHNA OF THE GITA

Every thing related of every hero in *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* I do not take literally, nor do I take these books as historical records. They give us essential truths in a variety of ways. Nor do I regard Rama and Krishna as portrayed in the two poems as infallible beings. They reflect the thoughts and aspirations of their ages. Only an infallible person can do justice to the lives of infallible beings. One can, therefore, only take the spirit of these works for only guidance, the letter will smother one and stop all growth. So far as the *Gita* is concerned, I do not regard it as a historical discourse. It takes a physical illustration to drive home a spiritual truth. It is the description not of a war between cousins but between the two natures in us—the good and the evil.

Young India, 19-3-1925

I have no knowledge that the Krishna of *Mahabharata* ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom the non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a

perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the *Gita* and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the *Mahabharata* is history in the sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the *Mahabharata* is authentic and Krishna of the *Mahabharata* actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate. But to me the *Mahabharata* is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think for the time being that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the *Mahabharata* as we have it now as a faultless copy of the original. On the contrary I consider that it has undergone many amendations.

Young India, 1-10-1925

CHAPTER 9

A JANMASHTAMI DISCOURSE

[The following is a summary of a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Arsikere in Mysore State:]

We do not know what Shri Krishna's life means for us, we do not read the *Gita*, we make no attempt to teach it to our children. The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. If we thought of Krishna on every *Janmashtami* day and read the *Gita* and resolved to follow its teachings, we should not be in our present sorry plight. Shri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *karma*. He refused proud Duryodhana's sweets and preferred humble Vidura's spinach. As a child he was a cowherd and we still know him by the name of Gopala. But we, his worshippers, have neglected the cow today, the Adi-Karnatakas slaughter cows and eat beef, and our infants and invalids have to go without cow's milk. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil of the world, we his posterity have

become indolent and forgotten the use of our hands. In the *Bhagavadgita* Lord Krishna has shown the path of *bhakti*—which means the path of *karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *bhaktas* or *jnanis*, *karma* is the only way; but the *karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done, by Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, by men, women and children? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also taught that to be a true *bhakta* we should make no difference between a *brahmana* and a scavenger. If that is true there can be no place for untouchability in Hinduism. If you are still hugging that superstition you can cleanse yourself by getting rid of it on this sacred day of Krishna's birth. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Musalman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by whatsoever name adores Him. The path of *bhakti*, *karma*, love as expounded in the *Gita*, leaves no room for despising of man by man.

Young India, 1-9-1927

CHAPTER 10

HINDU STUDENTS AND THE GITA

The other day, in the course of a conversation, a missionary friend asked me, if India was really a spiritually advanced country, why it was that he found only a few students having any knowledge of their own religion, even of the *Bhagavadgita*. In support of the statement, the friend who is himself an educationist, told me, that he made it a point to ask the students he met whether they had any knowledge of their religion or of the *Bhagavadgita*. A vast majority of them were found to be innocent of any such knowledge.

I do not propose to take up at the present moment the inference that because certain students had no knowledge of their own religion, India was not a spiritually advanced country, beyond saying that the ignorance on the part of students of religious books did not necessarily mean absence of all religious life or want of spirituality among the people to which the students belonged. But there is no doubt that the vast majority of students who pass through the Government educational institutions are devoid of any religious instruction. The remark of the missionary had reference to the Mysore students

and I was somewhat pained to observe that even the students of Mysore had no religious instruction in the State schools. I know that there is a school of thought which believes in only secular instruction being given in public schools. I know also that in a country like India, where there are most religions of the world represented and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there must be difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. But if India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instruction. It is true that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that of religion. But if we cannot have religion we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best. And whether there is such instruction given in the schools or not, grown up students must cultivate the art of self-help about matters religious as about other. They may start their own class just as they have their debating and now spinners' clubs.

Addressing the Collegiate High School students at Shimoga, I found upon enquiry at the meeting that out of a hundred or more Hindu boys, there were hardly eight who had read the *Bhagavadgita*. None raised his hand in answer to the question, whether of the few who had

read the *Gita* there was any who understood it. Out of five or six Musalman boys all raised their hands as having read the *Koran*. But only one could say that he knew its meaning. The *Gita* is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the *Gita* is, in my opinion, unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I nevertheless think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translations should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the *Gita* intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita* because they do not know Sanskrit.

Young India, 25-8-1927

CHAPTER 11

THE GITA IN SCHOOLS

A correspondent asks whether the *Gita* may be compulsorily taught in national schools to all boys whether Hindus or non-Hindus. When I was travelling in Mysore two years ago I had occasion to express my sorrow that the Hindu boys of a high school did not know the *Gita*. I am thus partial to the teaching of the *Gita* not only in national schools but in every educational institution. It should be considered a shame for a Hindu boy or girl not to know the *Gita*. But my insistence stops short at compulsion, especially so for national schools. Whilst it is true that the *Gita* is a book of universal religion, it is a claim which cannot be forced upon any one. A Christian or a Musalman or a Parsi may reject the claim or may advance the same claim for the Bible, the *Koran* or the *Avesta* as the case may be. I fear that the *Gita* teaching cannot be made compulsory even regarding all those who may choose to be classed as Hindus. Many Sikhs and Jains regard themselves as Hindus but may object to compulsory *Gita* teaching for their boys and girls. The case will be different for sectional schools. I should

hold it quite appropriate for a *Vaishnava* school, for instance, to lay down the *Gita* as part of religious instruction. Every private school has the right to prescribe its own course of instruction. But a national school has to act within well-defined limits. There is no compulsion where there is no interference with a right. No one can claim the right to enter a private school, every member of a nation has the right presumptively to enter a national school. Hence what would be regarded in the one case as a condition of entrance would in the other be regarded as compulsion. The *Gita* will never be universal by compulsion from without. It will be so if its admirers will not seek to force it down the throats of others and if they will illustrate its teachings in their own lives.

Young India, 25-8-1927

CHAPTER 12

GITA AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Though I admire much in Christianity, I am unable to identify myself with orthodox Christianity. . . . Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein,

not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impress upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavadgita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and, if they have not left any visible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgita*.

(From an address to Christian Missionaries, *Young India*, 6-8-1925)

The *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily verily I say unto you, not every one that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

Harijan, 18-4-1936

BY MAHATMA GANDHI

DISCOURSES ON THE GITA

Gandhiji wrote a series of letters in Gujarati to the inmates of the Satyagrahashram, Sabarmati, in which he devoted one letter to each chapter of the Gita.

Rs. 5.00

BY MAHADEV DESAI

THE GOSPEL OF SELFLESS ACTION
OR
THE GITA ACCORDING TO GANDHI

"Every page is evidence of Shri Desai's scholarship and exhaustive study of all he could lay hand upon regarding Bhagavadgita. In trying to give a translation of my meaning of the Gita, he found himself writing an original commentary on the Gita."

Rs. 100.00

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE,
AHMEDABAD-380 014

Rs. 5.00 **ISBN 81-7229-072-1**